March 3, 1991

8:30 and 11:00 a.m. Worship Services

John M. Buchanan

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

ON THE REPORT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY...

"Keeping Body and Soul Together:
Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice"

A Document Prepared for the 203rd General Assembly (1991)
by The General Assembly Special Committee on Human Sexuality,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1991.

Last Thursday the Chicago Tribune carried on page three an article about the Presbyterian Church and a new report on Human Sexuality.

Isn't it ironical that the only time in memory the Presbyterians made it into the first section of the newspaper the topic was sex?

Some of you asked about the article and some have said your friends have asked you about it.

The article referred to the publication, last week, of a report prepared by a Task Force appointed by the General Assembly two years ago. The title of the report is: "Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Justice."

The report will come to the General Assembly this June. The Task Force has already said that it will ask the Assembly to receive the report to be studied by the churches for two years before any of its recommendations are acted on.

That is, the report is not a position or policy of the Presbyterian Church.

It is a report of a Task Force of seventeen Presbyterians. Ten voted for it. Six were opposed to it. One abstained.

When asked about it recently, the current Moderator of the General Assembly, Price Gwynn, said, "There are three million Presbyterians in the United States. This report reveals what ten of them think about human sexuality. Now let's find out what the rest of us think."

The subject the report addresses is a critical one.

The Presbyterian Church is, and always has been, committed to open and honest discussion of all the issues of life with which Christians are confronted, believing that as Christians discuss, debate, argue, something of the truth - which is always God's will - becomes available.

So when a friend asks, "What are you Presbyterians up to now?" please remember that all we have done is ask seventeen people to produce a study document, which they have done; and, we are up to what we have always been up to - reconciling inquiry about God's love and God's creative will in our complex world.

ON THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND PEACE IN THE GULF...

It was not easy to be away from the pulpit for the past several Sundays.

I was privileged to be appointed an official observer at the Seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Assembly met in Canberra, Australia.

The World Council is an organization of Protestant and Orthodox Churches from all over the world whose constitution numbers more than 350 million.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a member. So is the Russian Orthodox, the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Iraqi Orthodox Church. The General Assembly meets every seven years.

The experience was inspiring:

- to worship daily in a huge tent with 3,000 Christians and at the end, to pray the Lord's Prayer, each in his/her native tongue.

- to listen to presentations by Aboriginal Christians on land rights and South Pacific Christians about nuclear waste and Armenian women about gender rights.

It was good to know that the Church of Jesus Christ around the world is taken very seriously, particularly by people who are marginalized in their own societies.

It was also good to know, in a very particular way, that much of the Christian world, particularly the Third World, does not view the United Stated with much kindness.

The Gulf War dominated. Here, a record percentage of people supported American and Allied action. There, in Canberra, there was almost no support, almost universal condemnation and anger and fear of American intentions.

That was not easy, either to hear or to understand.

It was most difficult to be away during the crisis. And now, in a matter of days, thankfully, an end to the fear, concern; an end to the shooting and the dying; and a reason this morning for a sigh of relief and deep gratitude to God -

- for peace,

- for the bravery and sacrifice of the men and women of our armed forces,

- for our political system,

and

- for our leaders.

But, without diminishing in any way our joy and gratitude, may I submit that it is also an occasion for reflection and new commitment? -

- a day to recall that every human life is precious, created in the image of God, and while our casualties were light, the Iraqis were not.

- a day for Christians to recall in the midst of some pain, that war is always a result of human failure, regardless of how enjoyable it is to watch on television and celebrate in the aftermath.

- a day for Christians, who claim the name of one called Prince of Peace, to recall and pray for and recommit themselves to those things which make for peace.

We know what they are. They are distressingly common and mundane -

- like our use of energy...

- like our sale of weapons...

- like our inconsistency with tyranny elsewhere...

- like the fact that much of the world does not believe, because it has not always seen American concern for justice.

The New York Times said this morning:

> "The burden of sustaining peace is endless, mundane and ultimately far more challenging."

Precisely.

And Christians, who on more than one occasion in history, have been criticized for their perceptions and faith, are today, I believe, called to give thanks, but also to grieve for those Americans and other coalition partners and Iraqis who died, to celebrate, but also to recommit our faith and our hearts and our political decisions to the establishing and maintaining of peace.

We have, in this congregation and in this sanctuary, prayed and stood together during this crisis. We will continue.

Our prayers for peace will continue daily at five thirty o'clock p.m. And adult education programs will continue after worship:

March 10, On The Role of the U.N.; March 17, Israeli Concerns; March 24, The Future of Palestine - each led by a distinguished expert.

And now will you join hearts and voices in a prayer for peace.

We will sing it:

"O day of God, draw nigh
In beauty and in power,
Come with your timeless judgment now
To match our present hour.

Bring to our world of strife
Your sovereign word of peace,
That war may haunt the earth no more
And desolation cease.

O day of God, draw nigh
As at creation's birth;
Let there be light again, and set
Your judgments in the earth."

(Hymn 452, "O Day of God, Draw Nigh,"
Robert B. Y. Scott, Stanzas 1, 4, 5,
The Presbyterian Hymnal, 1990)